

Don't try the same trick over and over

Here's a tip: if something does not work the first 50 times, don't do it again. Seriously. Stop. Re-evaluate. Don't waste your efforts.

Sure, practice makes perfect, if you are headed to Carnegie Hall. With marketing, practice (repetition) can lead to annoyance and disconnect.

Last November, I started collecting all the marketing mail that relates to FIOS, Verizon's fiber-optic service. To date, I have received nearly five pounds of direct mail and many robo-calls (although I finally got them to stop the robo-calls). Here's the clincher though: I have not signed up for FIOS. Verizon keeps sending me the same marketing pieces, over and over and over and over. Most egregious is the one that is marked: **Important Information About Your Verizon Service**. Really, how many times do you think I am going to fall for this? Once, maybe twice, but not dozens.

I am not sure what Verizon's strategy is here, but in my case, they are wasting tons of money and not to mention, killing many trees (yeah, I know you want me to switch to paperless billing, but I bet if you just cut out excessive direct mail you would save a ton).

My other example is from a online listing service I used to pay for. It changed, without informing me, and suddenly, I was getting no inquiries or even visits to my website from it. I stopped paying for the premium service. I tried to inform them why. No feedback form or even email address was available. And the guy who runs the service sends me emails at least twice a week asking me to sign up again. The same exact email, twice a week. I am not exaggerating. Again, why would

you continue to do something again and again if you are getting no results from it? Do you think I missed the email the first 25 times?

In any case, marketing communications is about strategy and tactics. You use certain tactics to implement your overall strategy. The thing is, you have many tactics at your disposal and you should fine tune your tactics so that you are achieving the result you want. If a tactic does not seem to work, shelve it. Put it away.

Your adaptability will help set you apart. Trust me on this. Don't waste your resources with tired tactics that don't work.

Who is helping you to help others?

Organizations that deal with the public typically have one or more frontline people. These people deal directly with the public, perhaps by giving directions, meeting and greeting or assisting in some way. Many times, these frontline people are also some of the least well compensated in the organization. But they are crucial in shaping how the public perceives the organization.

Have you ever walked into an office where the receptionist didn't even bother to greet you? Have you stood waiting for help at a "customer service" booth? Then you know that your interaction with people that are supposed to assist you can color how you perceive the organization that they represent. However, many organizations don't seem to grasp this simple concept and continue to deploy people in "helping" positions that are unwilling or unable to help, therefore damaging the

credibility and perception of the organization.

Here's a tip: if you are hiring someone to help you to deal with the public make sure that persons LIKES helping people.

On my last trip, I had trouble checking in on the kiosk. So, a very unhelpful, surly guy came over, growled at me and told me to go wait in line. He was absolutely rude and unpleasant. Do you think that makes me feel positive toward the airline in question?

Yesterday, I was in downtown DC to meet with a client. She had her laptop with her and we needed to go somewhere with WiFi. I couldn't think where the nearest Cosi was, but DC has deployed Downtown DC people in the Gallery Place area. I went up a woman with the Downtown DC jacket and asked her if she knew where the nearest Cosi was. She did. She gave us specific, perfect directions. She was helpful (and right). Contrast that with an exchange I had witnessed earlier inside a Metro station. A gentleman had approached the booth to ask a question, and the lady in the booth was BERATING him for tapping on her window. Does that make Metro look helpful? (BTW, I have had similar experiences with people in the booths...they just don't want to be bothered to do their jobs, that is, assisting people.)

As a marketing consultant, I can advise you to take a good look at who is dealing with public in your organization. These people are crucial because they create the first (and maybe the only) impression the public will have of your organization.

A bit of advice

HGTV (one of my favorite channels) has a show called Real Estate Intervention. It features a truth-telling real estate agent Mike Aubrey who brings a dose of reality to homeowners who are having a hard time selling their house. While we could discuss the fact that HGTV has had to adjust to the reality of a hard housing market (as this blog discusses) what I want to talk about is giving advice.

As a marketing consultant, I am required to give advice. I deal with questions like should you do a brochure, update your website or what your tag line should be. You would think that clients, who are paying for my opinion, would listen to it, but often, this is not the case. Many times, people want an outsider to bolster their ideas. For instance, if you think your website is fine as is, you want me to agree. If I don't agree, you dismiss me.

In the Real Estate Intervention show, people seem reluctant to listen to Mike because they often do not like what he has to say. His advice (usually, lower your asking price) is not what they want to hear. In spite of the fact that Mike shows comparable houses that sold for much less, the homeowners seem to believe that their houses are better and that people would pay much more money for it (even though they have not been able to sell their house at the asking price). The show really illustrates how hard it is to give advice.

Advice is tricky because people have preconceived notions. Most people think that they know as much or more than you know and if your advice does not match up to their ideas, then you must be wrong. Even when all evidence points to the contrary. We've seen lots of businesses pushing back against social media, for instance. Business owners don't believe it can help. Even though it does. But because it is not their reality they push back.

What can you do if you are in the business of giving advice? Well, the best is to be like Mike Aubrey. Make your case in the most concrete way possible. Facts and figures are very helpful. Never say “because I think so.” That won’t cut it. In the end, advice will only be received well by someone who is receptive. Accept this.

Elements of a successful event

Do you attend many networking events? I have gone to my fair share. Some are better than others. Here’s what I think makes a good event:

- 1) **A topic.** I appreciate that happy hour events draw people interested in getting a drink after work, but they don’t inform or give you anything to talk about. Having a topic and a speaker gives events an edge.
- 2) **Allocating time to networking.** Many times there is a speaker and/or a meal and no time to meet and mingle. Specifically allocated meet and mingle time is very important.
- 3) **Easy access.** If you are asking people to drive to your event, make sure there is plenty of parking (preferably free). If you want people to take public transport, then be close to the bus/subway stop.
- 4) **The right price.** Too expensive can be a real turnoff to people. The price should reflect the value, but it should also be within the range of other similar events. This morning I saw an event about social media that was comparable to other events I have been to/seen advertised, but was priced twice as

much. Would I go? No.

5) **Organizational ambassadors.** Some people are shy. If you are hosting an event, have members of your organization or group be hosts: greet people, tell them about your group and introduce them to others.

6) **Choosing day and time carefully.** Your event can be derailed by competing events. If possible, try to avoid conflicts.

Update: How could I forget this one?

7) **Food and drink.** There is nothing worse than going to an event that offers nothing. I once went to a wine and cheese that had neither wine nor cheese. Instead, we got leftover SoyJoy bars from another event and water. I kid you not.

What would you add?

What does the folding of Gourmet and Modern Bride mean?

Yesterday came the news that Conde Nast will be folding its long running and popular publications Gourmet and Modern Bride. A few other magazines are also ceasing publication, resulting in more people being laid off at Conde Nast. The reason? Decline in both ad sales and circulation.

What does it mean?

It means that print is on its last legs. With advertising down

across the board, and people abandoning print for various reasons (cost, environmental concerns, can get content online), I see a not-so-distant future where there will be no print magazines at all. The costs to print will outweigh the revenue generated, as was the case with Gourmet and Modern Bride.

Even with loyal readers, quality content and a weighty history, Gourmet will print its last issue in November. For now, C-N plans to keep printing Bon Appetit. Modern Bride's last issue is the current one. Brides will up its printing to monthly. Mergers in the print world mean less choice for advertisers. We may see ad prices jump. And then, will advertisers stick with print? Doubtful.

What are your thoughts?

The number 1 marketing tip

Are you trying to sell something? A product or a service? You probably are if you are reading this post, and my blog generally. You want more people to know about what you do, what you produce, what you sell. That is the entire point of any marketing communications effort.

However, beyond your product brochure, your social media strategy and your web page lies something much more important in your quest to sell: what it is that you are selling, exactly. Are you selling a product? If so, what is that product? What makes it good? What gives it the edge over other similar products in the marketplace? Are you providing a service? What does that service do for the customer? Why does the customer need that service?

I bring these questions up because the number one marketing tip is this:

Know your product or service.

If you don't, you will not be able to sell it to anyone. Period.

Let me give you an example. I was shopping for mascara the other day at a department store cosmetics counter. I wear contact lenses so mascaras that flake are not an option, since it would make my eyes water. I had been buying one particular type but wanted to try something different. I asked the saleswoman about several different types. She could not explain what the differences were, and whether they would be suitable for me other than to assure me that they would be fine. I was not convinced because she did not seem to understand her product. I ended up buying the same old product because I knew it. She did not sell me. And the reason she did not sell me is because she simply did not know her product.

I don't care if you are selling mascara or high end real estate. If you don't know what you are selling people will not buy it. It really is that simple.

Slogans have impact

We know of course that a good slogan or tagline is key in helping to make a business stand out. Slogans should be short and sweet and descriptive. Many slogans lack this last one: descriptive. They may be short and sweet, and maybe even clever, but they don't say anything.

I came across this wonderful blog entry in Budget Travel's

blog about travel slogans. The post talks about some memorable slogans such as “Virginia is For Lovers” and other not so memorable ones. The author talks about many of the Central American tourism slogans that just don’t seem to translate. El Salvador uses “Impressive!” and Guatemala uses “The Soul of the Earth.”

In any case, let this be an example about why you should choose your slogan carefully. Although brevity is good, description is better. What do you do? What makes you special? (The answer to this is never that you are unique...as I have said before few things are unique).

Do you have examples of slogans that you just love? Or that you just hate? Please share!

Why bother with print?

A Caffeinated Op-Ed

Today I want to question the Washington Post. Specifically, I want to know why it bothers searching for subscribers, and indeed, printing its newspaper every day. It seems to me, more and more, that the Post wants to get rid of subscribers and concentrate on giving away its content for free.

I often visit washingtonpost.com to see the weather, latest news, blogs, etc. I also get a subscription to the paper because I like to read printed material with my morning coffee. Today, as I was checking the WaPo website I saw that they have redesigned the Sunday magazine. And this is the kicker—all of it is available online for free, two days earlier than subscribers get the same material.

Subscribers PAY. Website visitors do not pay. Why on earth would you make MORE content available earlier at NO COST? How is this a smart business decision? Why would you not embargo content until paid subscribers can access it?

It seems to me that the Post is doing what it can to make sure people do not buy or subscribe to the printed newspaper. Anyone looking to save 75 cents per issue can just log on to the website and get all the content of the printed piece plus early content and not pay a cent. That translates to at least a \$6.00 per week (the Sunday paper costs \$1.50).

Should I cancel my subscription? I ask that to the Washington Post. Why on earth should I continue to pay for something I could get for free????

How are you perceived?

“Quick, acute, and intuitive cognition.” That is how Merriam-Webster defines perception. It is a quick assessment of what is before us. It is how we form impressions and judgments.

Have you ever considered how you are perceived by a potential client? Potential friend? Man/woman on the street? Obviously, we may not care how a complete stranger perceives us, but in business we should definitely be concerned with the image we are giving potential customers, clients or partners (a partner can be anyone who we do business with—from someone we network with, to someone who refers business to us or an acquaintance we run into occasionally).

There are many angles from which you are perceived:

- Personal appearance and demeanor

- How you sound
- Online presence, which includes your websites, what is written about you, your blog, and your social media presence
- Articles about you
- Articles you've written
- Your marketing materials (brochures, postcards, reports, etc)
- Your behavior and actions
- Your associations

If people have a positive perception of you it will help get business. A negative perception on the other hand will impede your success.

How to assess

Start with a simple Google search on yourself to see what comes up. Negative, positive or neutral?

Turn a critical eye on your website and/or blog. Would a visitor to your site know what you do and why you are qualified to do what you do? What would he/she think of your services?

How are people responding to you on social media? How many followers do you have? More importantly, who is following you? Quality is important here. How about on Linked In—do people accept your requests for connection? Are you giving them enough for them to want to connect with you?

When you go to an event, do you feel confident? Do you ever feel unprepared or frazzled? If so, what aspects of you appearance and demeanor need work?

It is hard to self-assess from all these angles so it may be best to ask a trusted friend or colleague to give you some feedback. A marketing consultant (such as me!) can help assess your marketing materials.

Have you assessed how you are perceived? Please let me know how you did it and what helped.

Culture in communications

I just finished reading Malcolm Gladwell's very insightful *Outliers*. I recommend it if you want to think about success as being a meeting of opportunity, chance and ability. And, my friend and colleague Daria Steigman just posted a question about culture in social media on her blog, *Independent Thinking*.

Daria wants to know if culture affects communication. *Outliers* can answer this question. Without a doubt, the answer is yes. In *Outliers*, Gladwell talks about the Avianca plane crash a few years ago on Long Island, NY. The plane crashed because it had run out of fuel after circling for hours due to bad weather in the area. Gladwell thinks that if the culture of the first officer flying the plane had allowed him to be less deferential toward the JFK control tower, he would have been able to make an emergency landing at Kennedy. Instead, he was not forceful in telling the tower that the plane was dangerously low on fuel. I highly recommend you read the book to fully understand this concept.

Suffice it to say that different cultures expect different communications from different people. Some cultures are more hierarchical and others less so. Some are more cooperative. Some are more focused on results. Whatever the differences are, any communications messages must reflect these nuances.

In Spanish, for instance, there is a difference between the

more familiar “tu” and the more formal “usted.” In certain Spanish-speaking countries, everyone uses tu and it is considered old-fashioned to use usted. In other countries, if you don’t know someone, you automatically use usted. Clearly, an ad written in one of the pronouns that doesn’t take into consideration the norm of the country may insult or offend or not reach its intended audience.

Culture matters in communications. A good communicator always knows his or her target audience, and one of the most important qualifiers to that target is culture.